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STATE FOR DRL (OSTERMEIR), IO/RHS, WHA/CAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2014

TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV UNHRC CA

SUBJECT: CANADA WELCOMES U.S. DURBAN WITHDRAWAL AND UN HRC
RE-ENGAGEMENT

REF: STATE 18282

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Deputy Director for Human Rights Policy Chantale Walker on February 27 welcomed the U.S. decision to discontinue negotiations on the current text of the Durban Review Conference (reftel). Walker noted that Canada shares the U.S. concerns with the text, namely the singling out of one country, the attempt to regulate "defamation of religion," and the language on reparations for slavery. Walker said that Ottawa was not surprised by the negative direction taken by the Durban Review Conference Working Group, adding that it did not expect any better from such a tainted process. Walker stated that Canada will maintain its absence from the Durban process, and is pleased that the U.S. and Canada are now back on the same page.

¶2. (C) Walker also welcomed the U.S. decision to resume participation as an observer at this month's UN Human Rights Council session, noting that it "will be good to have the U.S. back again." Walker emphasized that Canada is strongly committed to improving the effectiveness and performance of the UN HRC and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism. Canada will soon be engaging with Canadian civil society organizations to follow up on the UPR recommendations. According to DFAIT Deputy Director for Human Rights Policy Michael McCulloch, the October 2008 Canadian federal elections had hindered the government's ability to engage with civil society in preparation for its UPR. Walker stated that Canada had already observed some positive outcomes from the latest UPR round, with some countries making improvements in their human rights performance.

¶3. (C) Comment: Canada closely followed the recent U.S. policy review on the Durban process, and viewed the U.S. effort to engage with the Durban Review Conference Working Group with concern. Canada looks forward to continued close cooperation with the U.S. in the UN HRC and other fora, and, as a close friend and partner, always values highly advance consultations before any U.S. decision that could leave Canada isolated internationally.

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